



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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Which is but pride taking the lowest place
 That so no further fall be possible,
 The condemnation issues from themselves,
 They had refused to read in obstacles
 That hindered their advance. "They are not fit,
 They never were, they never will be fit
 For aught but to escape from eyes of men
 And silent creep to an unhonoured grave!"

* * * *

"Moses was content to dwell with the man."

Only the warped in mind do fret and fume
 And spend their force in mad attempts to shift
 The stubborn bounds that fix their place in life.
 True natures acquiesce — holding as creed
 That Circumstance, a sacred oracle,
 Speaks with the voice of God to faithful souls.

"Content to dwell"

With Midian's shepherd chief and herd his flock,—
 The only record of the prophet's mind
 In all those forty years.

* * * *

*"The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh
 unto his friend."*

High years! that stand
 As the red-letter era of our race:
 Days when a man did prove how high, how deep,
 Mere man might reach in knowledge of our God:
 Height never soared, depth never sounded since,
 Save by the Son Who shares the Father's essence.
 O Mystery of Grace! that any man,
 Standing for forty years with open breast
 Beneath the full down-dropping of the Spirit,
 Should be at last so utterly fulfill'd,
 Possessed, imbued, with the mind divine,
 That apprehending human eye could meet
 The gaze of God!—that He, once among men,
 Should note the glow of answering sympathy!

A PLAIN ACCOUNT OF A KERRY POTATO-PATCH.

April to November, 1902.

BY E. A. MAGILL.

DURING the early months of this spring I amused myself—as orders were to do no real work—by doing odd jobs in the kitchen-garden, being taken on as "garden boy." This led me to think I should be able to work a little garden of my own. For many years I had been hoping that some day I should have time and opportunity to experiment on the possibilities of market-gardening, and now it seemed the occasion had come, the only question to be decided being where was the experiment to be carried on. In the field outside the west wall of the real garden and bordered on the north wall by the extension (continuation) of the garden south wall, a croquet lawn some 100 ft. square had been enclosed and levelled during the preceding winter. The simplest plan seemed to be to allot to me a plot round about the croquet lawn. Taking the wall facing east, *i.e.*, the west wall of the old garden, which is 200 ft. long, as radius, and the angle it makes with the north protecting wall at centre, a circle was described, and the quadrant contained by the two walls nominated "My Potato Garden." Note that I had only 80 ft. of wall, the east one, a couple of elms grow by the other, so it all appertains to the croquet lawn, which makes the area of my patch—the area of the lawn being deducted—about 2381 yards or half an acre. I should perhaps explain that hereaway any part of a field which is set aside by the farmer, as this was, is designated his potato garden. My original intention too was to set the greater part of this half acre with Brown Rocks, a good potato to set in April. But I wished to test what could be done by one individual with the very least possible capital, and if £10 per statute acre be the least working capital which should be invested in a farm, how much should one be prepared to invest in a garden?

I decided later to put in cabbage as being cheaper than potatoes, and I am not so sure that I did decide wrongly:

Potato seed should have cost about £5 0 0 per acre (English)

Manure—

Farmyard, £2; Artificial, £3 5 0 0 „

Other expenses—

Harvesting, Marketing, etc. 5 0 0 „

£15 0 0

Cabbage plants at 3s. per 1000 .. 1 10 0 „

Manure 2 10 0 „

Other expenses 2 0 0 „

£6 0 0 „

Potato yield average—13 tons per acre at 3s. per cwt. = £39 0 0

In the Dublin markets from 1st October to middle November,

Irish potatoes 3s. 9d. to 2s. 10d.

Cabbages at 1d. per head or 8s. per 100, *i.e.*, 120 .. £30 0 0

Locally, 1½d. or 2d. per head is not unusual in December.

An old glass frame, 8 ft. by 4½ ft. by 1¼ ft., and a donkey and cart—the poorest peasant would possess the latter—were all the “plant” available.

A Glass Frame made by local carpenter cost .. £0 14 0

Including cost of timber, putty, glass, nails, paint and carpenter's wage.

Donkey and Harness £1 15 0 Cart .. £2 10 0

On April 9th the paling round the lawn was taken up and put out to my boundary; by that day week the plot had been marked out, manure ploughed in, and harrowed. The plan is of the simplest: a patch, roughly semi-circular, round the paling, a border 15 ft. by 80 ft. along the east wall, two other borders running south and east respectively, the one 80 ft. by 10 ft., the other 90 ft. by 10 ft., round the lawn, and an ugly triangular plot, area 50 square yards, in the angle between the wall border and that running east. The latter is called the “Flower Border,” as it is given over to furnishing the “pleasant” part of the garden.

Keeping in mind that the fact to be ascertained was if with small capital such a plot would pay, it is evident that the thing to be done during this first year was to get the land into a state of cultivation, and at the end of twelve months to have paid the rent (!) and yet have enough cash left to venture forward. So far the actual money put out was 5s. for

hire of horses, plough and harrow, and 25s. for seven tons of farmyard manure; hire of man, plough and horses is 11s. per day, working from 7 30 a.m. to 6 p.m.; patch took four hours altogether to plough and harrow. The semi-circular patch, the area of which is 2,000 square yards, was put up into “lazy beds,” *i.e.*, long beds 4 ft. wide with a 1½ ft. trench between each, in these 4,250 cabbage at 3s. per 1,000, 13s., were planted, and in the two long borders 800 cauliflowers at 2s. 6d. per 100, £1.

The flower border and the triangle were not left idle; in one, 100 plants of California Violets at 20s. per 100 found a home. This kind of violet is far the best for amateurs. A seed-raising bed was got ready, for this a trench 9 ft. long by 5 ft. wide and 3 ft. deep was dug out and filled with stable manure, which was covered with ½ ft. of earth. Over the “hot bed” thus prepared the glass frame was placed, under which, on the bed, were boxes of stocks, wallflowers, carnations, and other flower seeds—these cost 5s.; also a “pinch” of cabbage seed. That “pinch” proved a bright idea! It is always better to start even cabbages under glass if the seedlings be pricked out as soon as they can be handled.

One other item and then the summary of the stock of this trial ground is completed. When the violets in the garden within the walls were being rebedded and spring-cleaned, the useless (?) “runners” were thrown into the weed fire. A few I saved. “Is it this *dirt* you want, Miss?” from a scornful garden boy, in the act of throwing that last armful after the others. “This dirt” I put into water for two to three hours, then shortened the “runners” and stuck them into a spare corner of the triangle. From that corner 100 good plants of Princess of Wales' Violets were transplanted into rich mould in the last week of August. These violets are about the same price as the Californians. I do not think they are quite so hardy nor so prolific, but the flowers are enormous and deliciously fragrant, and they sell better. It is not good to allow violet plants to spend their strength in growing runners.

In August and September I was allowed to keep the few hundred plants, off which came the “dirt” above referred to, free of these thieves. The result is some 4,000 to 5,000 young plants, that will be ready for sale or removal to

flowering quarters next March or April. Summing up, initial expenses so far amounted to £4 8s. 6d.

I do not propose to bore you with daily extracts from my diary, but I wish you could have seen the cabbage in my Potato Patch—which groweth no potatoes!—on Friday evening, the 30th May, not one plant had missed, even the “slug” had been obliging and sought food elsewhere. The symmetry of the beds was really admirable; and there was the “pinch” that had been sown under the frame about six weeks before, thriving. The nights are still cold in May, and to shield the seedlings from any unkindly frost, they were covered with matting. The morning after I had been showing off my little garden, I went out rather early—between 5.30 and 6—to work in it. When I opened the door that leads into it from the kitchen garden, I could see no cabbage, only sheep! The whole flock, over 200, had broken through the fence of the field they were in, found the wicket by the croquet lawn open, and advanced in force to breakfast off my cabbage. They retired in haste! I had arrived in time to save the cauliflower that was hardly touched, the bast matting had saved the seedlings. But alas! every lazy bed was cleared of everything but cabbage stalks. It was mid-June before the seedlings were big enough to clothe the desert. That “pinch” was a good idea, wasn’t it?

I have not yet referred to the nature of the soil nor the labour necessary to get it up to an average state of cultivation. This strip of land between the McGillicuddy reeks and the Tralee hills is mostly either bog or red sandy loam. Red sandy loam is the best for early potatoes; even if it be a trifle light as ours is, ’tis better than bog. There the frost grips more keenly: tubers are not sufficiently regular for early market, nor is the quality up to the mark. My patch is sandy. The field of which it was a part has been untilled—“ban,” as we say—for many years, wherefore thistles have found it a suitable lodging-place; also when it used to be tilled this corner “along by the garden wall” was considered a suitable place to throw all the stones gathered off the field. To clear the plot of stones was a serious undertaking. The paths are grass, hence the stones had to be removed. ’Tis done. Peat-mould was to be had for the taking “back in the bog,” so the whole had a top-dressing of it. A little bog-mould would not unfit the patch for early potatoes, the

soil being somewhat *too* sandy. I have not made out a “labour-bill,” because most of the work I did myself. I do not think a man has worked there for three weeks altogether. Three weeks’ labour would be 30s., and there could be no work connected with such a bit of land which a boy—I might almost say a woman—could not do. It would really be difficult with the data I have to reckon how much of a man’s time it would take to keep my garden up to pattern, though it was “ban” a man has not worked twenty whole days in it. I seldom did more than two or three hours’ work there daily—for two months none at all. Certainly a man’s labour for six weeks, working full hours, would be ample *while the produce was confined to potatoes and cabbage*. Labour here is 10s. a week, so £3 would be enough to allow for the year. I am not sure about the ploughing.

The first monetary return this garden made was 21s. for the flower-seedlings, postage and advertising expenses being deducted; then the cauliflower, 90s., cost of sending eight miles to market, and tolls, deducted. The cabbage from the sixpennyworth of seed is nearly all gone now, at 7s. per 100, that is £15, or £30 per acre. Some realized 10s., others 8s. per 100, so I have stated the lowest figure. The violets bring about 3s. a week.

Allowing 18s. for rent, that is, 30s. per acre, which is more than double what could be obtained for much cultivated land in this part of Ireland, the output and income of £ s. d. reads: expenses, £6 16s. 6d.; which being paid, leave £13 14s. 6d.* £6 of that will now go in planting early potatoes: the seed will cost £3, the manures—for artificials must be used—£2 10s., the necessary ploughing, etc., 10s. If those “Puritans” be on the market by June 1st and sell at £45 per acre, it is a simple sum to make out what return this potato-patch should yield on £6 16s. 6d. in thirteen months. The clear profit should, by June 1st, work out to between £27 and £30, if the violets and little flowers be allowed for their sweetness’s sake to count for something!

For the reasons already stated, I have not reduced the labour to money-value. £13 14s. 6d. is not much to clear from eight months’ work, and for that reason I feel my patch is hardly of an age to be talked about. But a year’s rent has been paid, and there is a balance to carry the experiment

* Output, £6 16s. 6d.; income, £20 11s.

forward. The return, small as it is, has far exceeded my expectations; in spite of an unusually cold summer, and the depredations of sheep, I believe I have won. I know now—having learned through many mistakes—that that £13 could, with ease, have been doubled during the eight months.

Yields and money-returns from small plots, when converted into yields and returns per acre, almost invariably come out very much greater than those of crops grown on a large scale, even when one is most careful to ensure accuracy and to allow a good margin to cover such expenses as rent, rates, cultivation, seed, manure, harvesting, and marketing. This I know—I have borne it in mind, and yet I am wholly confident, through the teaching I have received from my little potato-patch, and from the facts I have gathered from other similar experiments carried out by other experimenters—that intensive agriculture is what the country wants.*

You see this experiment has been looked at altogether from a commercial standpoint. I have told you nothing about the flower-border, with its wealth of stock, mignonette, old clove carnations, etc., that with the great hedge of sweet-pea round the cabbage bed, saturated the air with fragrance in the summer and autumn evenings. Nor have I told you of the family of wee wood-wrens that were brought up in a cranny in the ivy-covered wall, and let me watch them at their first flying lessons; nor of the golden-crested wren, who is so much tamer, and still comes through from the kitchen garden to enquire what I am doing. The robins I ignore, only they do look so hurt if I forget their weakness for cake, that I had better refer to them “by the way.” Why I chiefly love to go down into my garden is not to look at cabbage that sells at a penny a head, but because from it I can see straight away to the mountains. It is open on the east and south to the wide field, which is bordered by a belt of firs that make rather a fitting setting to the high hills five miles off.

You remember those lines of T. Brown’s, beginning,—

“A garden is a lovesome spot—God wot.”

My garden has no fringed pool nor fern grot, but from it one may lift up one’s eyes unto the hills and see all their

* Note the agricultural history of Denmark during the last thirty years. Read *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, by Prince Krapotkin.

surpassing glory. And on a clear day one can imagine one sees far off the outlines of a scheme of intensive agriculture which might possibly be a means of bringing salvation—*i.e.*, health—to the minds and bodies of the natives of this hapless county, which, in spite of all its wondrous mystic beauty, is, as regards civilizing enterprise—according to statistics—the most hopeless district in Ireland.

Were I ever to say a word about gardening for the little ones, it would resolve itself into a plea to let the children do all the work in their gardens themselves. There is absolutely nothing which a child of nine cannot do himself in a garden of about 140 square yards. Let him make mistakes. Let him dig up the bulbs in his *own* garden to find out what they are doing down there in the dark silent earth—if they don’t behave the least bit differently to the ones in glasses! Let him plant them upside down if he wants to see what will happen! Only two things do *not* let him do: call the soil “dirt,” or earth-worms “beasts.” You are neglecting him if he does either.

Children love to possess property, and to have sole charge of a piece of ground develops the idea that they are responsible citizens in a wonderful way. If a child keeps his holding in a condition that offends the other land-holders in his vicinity, it is not fit that that holding should remain his. Such is the law! Only *very* lazy tenants are put out, so he *must* keep his plot free from weeds. When we were children, the idea of evicting originated amongst ourselves. Once only had a writ to be issued, but the offender was very penitent, and had redeemed her property by careful weeding before the days of grace were up.

I have mentioned the word “dirt.” It reminds me that there is one lesson gardening teaches everyone—big and little—perfectly, it is this: in a garden there is no such thing as “dirt.” “Nature’s” economy is very plain: she has a use for everything in garden ground. Weeds, stones, dead rats, in a garden all have their proper places. (I don’t know about slugs or sparrows!) I have met people who have thought it wrong to allow the children to manure their own gardens! I have seen people hold up their hands in holy horror at the idea of a grown-up person digging farm-yard manure into her garden! It is strange how we cramp the

child-mind with the paralyzing idea that there could be work in a garden which it is *infra dig.* for him to do!

Next to letting the children do as they like in their gardens, let them *learn* as they like: they will come to the grown-up friend fast enough when they want advice or information. It is all-important not to hamper them as they try to seek out knowledge in their own way. It was with something like horror I heard a very keen gardener say a few days ago: "The children are always asking questions about their gardens! If only someone would write a book on gardening for children!" *A book on gardening for children!* Truly I would say a prayer of thankfulness could I hope that such a thing does not exist! I will tell you how a small child of nine felt once when someone suggested that a book on gardening for grown-ups was outside her comprehension. It was on such a bleak east-windy day as this that a book arrived for her. The parcel was opened before all the family, the small child bursting with suppressed excitement. It had come at last! There it was in its sober green cover: Sutton's *Culture of Vegetables and Flowers*. There were questions: "Who sent it?" "Where has it come from?" "What will you do with it?" "Oh, I ordered it myself! I bought it all with my own money—my 'carnation money,' you know." "You! Do you think a scrap like you will be able to understand all Messrs. Sutton have to say about vegetables and flowers?" Did I think! After watching those plants—raised from Sutton's own Prize Carnation seed—grow, after tending them for so many months, and at last letting them go—not without tears—in order to get the necessary 5s. for Mr. Sutton's book.* And now it was supposed that I would not be able to understand it! Did I think, indeed! Poor grown-ups, they were to be pitied, but really 'twas hardly to be endured! Well, just the same indignation and pity comes over me now when I hear these wise people talk of a book on gardening for children. Therefore, I would suggest that in this matter the children be treated with due reverence; that we take heed lest we offend one of these little ones who so delight to do all the work in their own way in their own gardens. There are numbers of excellent books for amateurs, and papers and journals which the children can use. How

* Our gardens were from the first self-supporting-

we children used to look forward to Fridays when our paper came, for nearly every week it had an answer to some query we had sent in to the editor. It is unnecessary to insist on the fact that such gardening is a most mighty power for good in the moulding of character. There is not a day that the child has not to make at least one decision, if it be only the answer to "What shall I do in my garden to-day?" He is always observing; he learns to "translate his thoughts into actions"; to obey law; to watch its working patiently; to count no beginning small, for there is nothing "not worth doing." He can confidently say "I know" and "I don't know." He experiments; he compares; he deduces. In fact, as a training preparatory to the study of any part of physical science, I wonder is there—could there be—a better! For is not the child-gardener like Bacon's scientific student, "a bee that gathers and produces"? The altruistic side of his being is not left to shrink. Let him once see the delight which a gift of flowers of his own growing can give to those who have no garden, and it will only be necessary to enquire occasionally "What flowers are you sending to So-and-so this week?" Slowly, but very surely, his garden will teach the child that this world is a very comely place; that the garments of this earth are right glorious within and without; and that to each one is given a little bit of the embroidery of those stately robes to do, and if anyone does not try to do his bit a long way better than his very best, he is simply no use.

There is no part of my life that I recall with such keen pleasure as the two years, eight to ten, and all the joy is in that one word "garden." I have hardly gardened at all since those days, excepting this last nine months. The foregoing remarks are put forward with all diffidence. I write now as a common labourer and not at all as a gardener. I know I am unskilled, but I do firmly believe that it is in the direction of wholesome out-door occupation that the way lies, for the most of us, towards that whole mind or sanity which means nearness to God, without which we, with our littleness, can never comprehend anything of the great beauty which our God has set all around us for our entertainment.

And that seems to be all my "Potato-Patch" has to say for itself to-day!